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How Uber is Lyfting Access to Healthcare

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Self-Driving Cars and Ride-Sharing services have quickly become a solution for senior citizens in need of transportation to and from doctor appointments, grocery stores, daily errands and visits to family and friends. In 2015, it was reported that 27% of ride-sharing service users were older adults (Turner-Lee, 2019, p. 91). Therefore, ride-sharing service companies, such as Uber and Lyft, have started shifting their business models toward older adults.

However, many senior citizens do not have smartphones or are not comfortable using them. Third-party companies, such as [GoGoGrandparent](#), simplify the ordering process by arranging rides on Uber and Lyft for elders that call-in, making the process less device-dependent. These services also provide features such as handicap accessibility, help getting to and from the door, or "an option to alert the rider's caregiver where their older loved one is going and who their driver is" (RideGuru, 2019, Para. 10-12). These third party companies are closing the gap between elders that can afford smartphones and those who cannot in addition to the gap between elders who know how to use smartphones and those who do not. This increases access to healthcare.

Similarly, health care providers are beginning to partner directly with Uber and Lyft to transport their patients to and from hospitals, physician practices, individual practitioners, etc. In fact, Lyft is estimated to drive 7 million patients to and from medical appointments, where the ride is fully arranged and financially covered by the healthcare provider (RideGuru, 2019, Para. 11). This partnering offers a solution for elderly patients who cannot afford ride sharing services.

Although ride-sharing services are a step in the right direction, we are left with questions such as, "What if Uber or Lyft are not available in someone's local area?" It is estimated that 15% of elderly persons live in rural areas, which presents challenges for delivering healthcare services (McSweeney-Feld, Molinari, Oetjen, 2017, p. 185). While ride-sharing may be the answer for some areas without public transportation, ride-sharing services are typically not offered in rural settings, leaving some elderly people without access to healthcare services. Therefore, further innovation is needed to expand access.

Moreover, additional research is needed to better understand how these services might improve healthcare access overall, such as:

- How are these resources equipped for patients with intellectual disabilities?

- How can we ensure patient safety on these rides?
- How can we ensure patient confidentiality in accordance with HIPPA regulations?

Ride-sharing services are increasing access to healthcare for those without means of transportation. While we are left with some unresolved questions, ride-sharing is a foundation to build on. At the rate at which ride-sharing technology is advancing, we can only expect the access to healthcare to increase as well.

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